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INTRODUCTION: MAPS, POWER, AND LEGITIMACY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 Explain the power of maps and naming.
- 1.2 Define the concepts of politics, power, and legitimacy.
- 1.3 Describe the contemporary study of comparative politics.

Years ago, I hosted a group of university students from the Arab World for a summer leadership program. I would often spar intellectually with one of my favorite students, a young woman from Palestine, or maybe we referred to it as the West Bank back then—our vocabulary, the maps in our mind, change over time. Let's call her Nadima. I tried to persuade Nadima of my view: accepting the status quo with the state of Israel was the clearest path forward for the Palestinian people. She pushed back, explaining what was at stake for her. Over the course of conversation, it came out that her family had been relatively prosperous merchants in the town of Jaffa, a port on the Mediterranean Sea that is now a suburb of Tel Aviv. In fact, Tel Aviv was founded as a Jewish alternative to the densely populated and predominantly Arab town of Jaffa.¹ During the strife surrounding the founding of Israel in 1948 thousands of Arabs—including Nadima's relatives—fled, and in 1950 Jaffa (also known as Yafo) was annexed by Tel Aviv. Ever since, her family has lived in a refugee camp.

As the discussion continued, I proposed a thought experiment: various international aid agencies could find a suitable site elsewhere in the region and fund the building of New Jaffa. It could look exactly the same. The streets could have the same names as before. Those who lost their homes previously, like Nadima's family, could find new ones in this new-old city. Nadima looked at me as if I were from another planet. The scenario I laid out—this map both literally and in the sense of a plan to move forward—was pure fantasy to her. She said that there was and could be one, and only one, Jaffa. It could simply never be recreated anywhere else. My conversation with Nadima reinforced to me the challenges of building lasting peace in her region, the attachments many people have to a specific place, and how influential the maps in our minds are.

This story encapsulates many of the themes of this book—most especially the importance to us of the physical spaces in which we live and the maps that define those spaces. The word *map* can mean many different things.² First, there are conventional **maps** that visually depict actual physical spaces with geographical features such as coastlines, rivers, and mountain ranges. Maps can also show human-created political and social features such as railroads, airports, and borders between communities—cities and suburbs, different national states, or between more ambiguous and contested places such as the West Bank/Palestine and the state of Israel.

THE POLITICS AND POWER OF MAPPING

The definition of maps presented above is something very concrete. However, we can understand the term *map* conceptually, even metaphorically. A map can be seen as a plan, a guide, a representation, or even a story. We can have maps of how a political system is structured and how it functions. We can have a mental map of a country's people—who lives where, how are they related, and how they interact. Culture in all senses can be construed as a map, a guide to how a people behaves or how an individual should act in a particular context. History can also be considered a map, a story, of how a person or a group developed and arrived at the present. Even a graph, figure, or calculation is a kind of guide or map to an underlying concept. This book will use maps in all of these senses—as visual representations of countries and regions around the globe, but also as guides and stories, to help us understand key issues in comparative politics. In whatever way maps are used, however, they are central to the study of comparative politics because maps are also always about power.

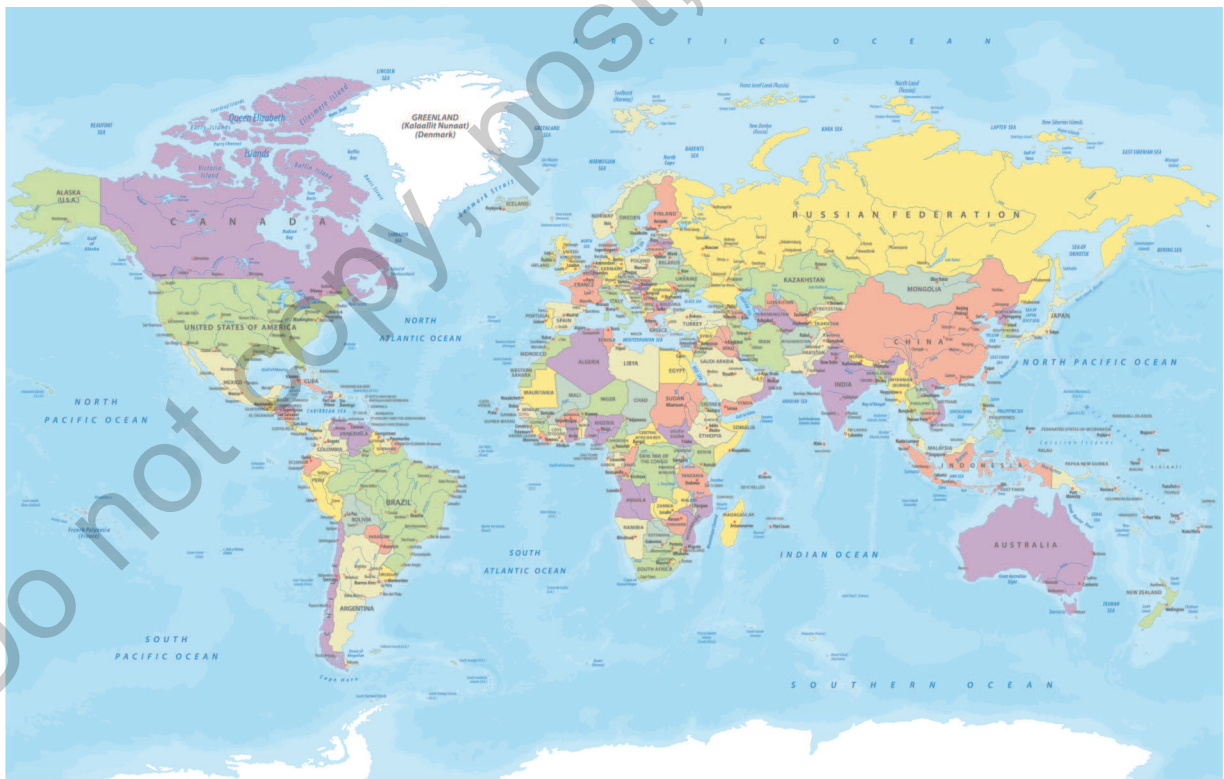
People who study how and why different countries are organized politically, economically, and socially are interested in power because it determines the very boundaries and limits of the countries they study. Knowing who really holds power and influence within a given country, understanding that when power shifts within one country there are spillover effects for others around it, or why generations of people dispute ownership over a piece of land are just some of the many questions at the heart of comparative politics. The effects of power are especially visible on maps, which help us visualize or grasp these many questions and issues.

Maps and the Visual Display of Power

The ability to map and name the world around us is one of the most central and powerful acts in politics—even and especially if we are unaware of the choices made. To illustrate, let's begin by comparing some maps. Most people are probably familiar with the political map of the world depicted in Figure 1.1. For decades, even for centuries, we have envisioned the world in this way, color coding each jurisdiction. Today, political maps mainly show internationally recognized states, but previously we would have seen many empires and their colonial possessions displayed.

Is this a benign geographical representation? Maybe. However, note some key observations. For instance, the focal point of Figure 1.1 centers on Europe, maybe North Africa, and certainly the

FIGURE 1.1 ■ An Atlantic-Centered View of the World

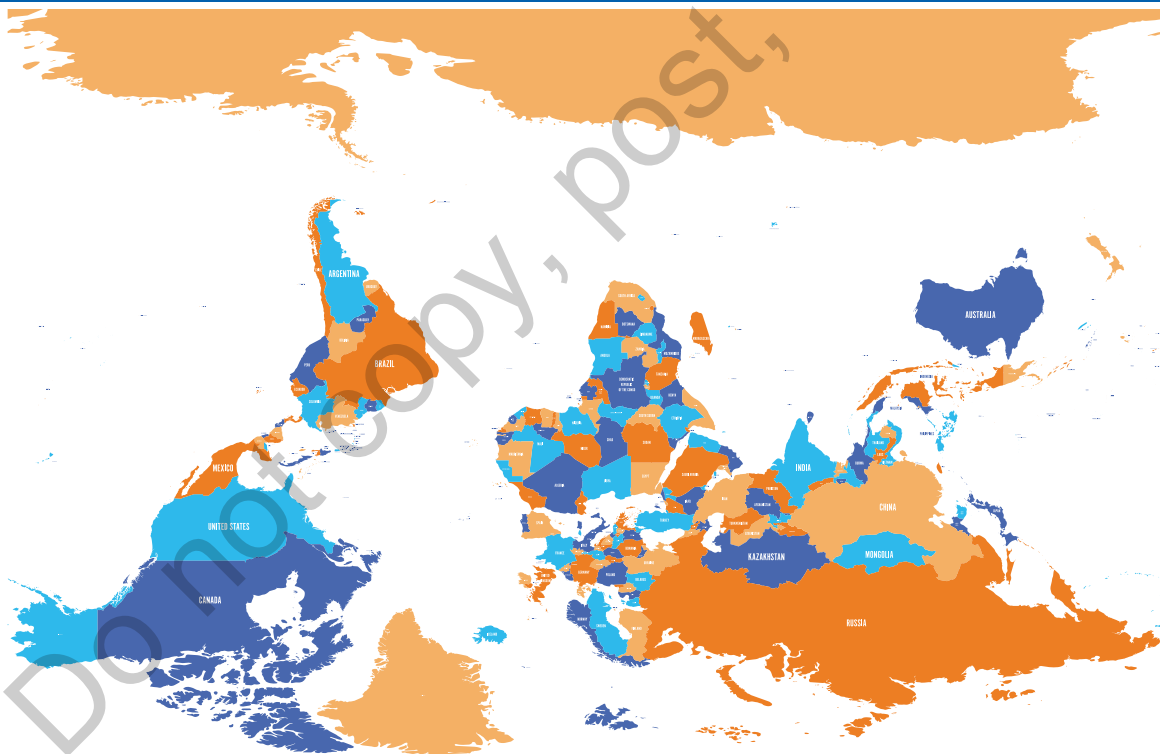


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North Atlantic Ocean. The Pacific Ocean looks like an afterthought—unimportant, dead space, vanishing from the margins. Admittedly, there is always a problem creating a two-dimensional representation of the three-dimensional, spherical planet Earth. Some kind of distortion is necessary. Figure 1.1 uses the **Mercator projection**, in which the extreme northern and southern places—Greenland, Alaska, Norway, or Antarctica—appear much larger than in geographical reality.

Compare this map with one showing the Southern Hemisphere up at the top of the map and with the focal point on West Africa (see Figure 1.2). What do you notice here? Where does your eye go first? Humans project importance onto things that are centered at the focal point, things that are larger, or things that are up rather than down. Why is north always positioned at top of modern maps? This is not preordained by a divine being but is rather a convention, a choice that eventually became standard, accepted practice. All conventions are assertions (consciously or not) of power.³ There are many alternative mapping choices with very different effects on the viewer. Consider another political map (Figure 1.3) that centers on the Pacific. Now, Europe and the Atlantic are on the periphery, on the margins of the map—seemingly less important than the focal point around Northeast Asia and the North Pacific Ocean. Think about the kinds of assumptions you might make as someone studying important differences between countries if you could only consult the Atlantic-centered political map of the world.

FIGURE 1.2 ■ A South-Up View of the World



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FIGURE 1.3 ■ A Pacific-Centered Map of the World

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Another common way that power can be projected is in the representation of size. Compare the next two maps. Figure 1.4 uses the so-called Mercator projection that we saw in Figure 1.1. Figure 1.5 is based on the Gall-Peters projection, which attempts to maintain accurate area proportions. Preferred by the National Geographic Society, among other organizations, the **Gall-Peters projection** was developed to provide a more accurate representation of the relative sizes of landmasses on the earth's surface, particularly at higher latitudes. Landmasses closer to the poles are not exaggerated in size, as they are in the Mercator projection. In the Gall-Peters projection, Africa, India, and South America all appear much larger than in the Mercator projection and are closer to their actual geographical size. (Sorry, Alaska and Greenland, you are just not as big.) The use of the Mercator projection, centered on the North Atlantic with north at the top, was a choice made by Europeans at the height of their global power.⁴ They were able to impose their preference on many others around the world.

Maps and the Power of Naming

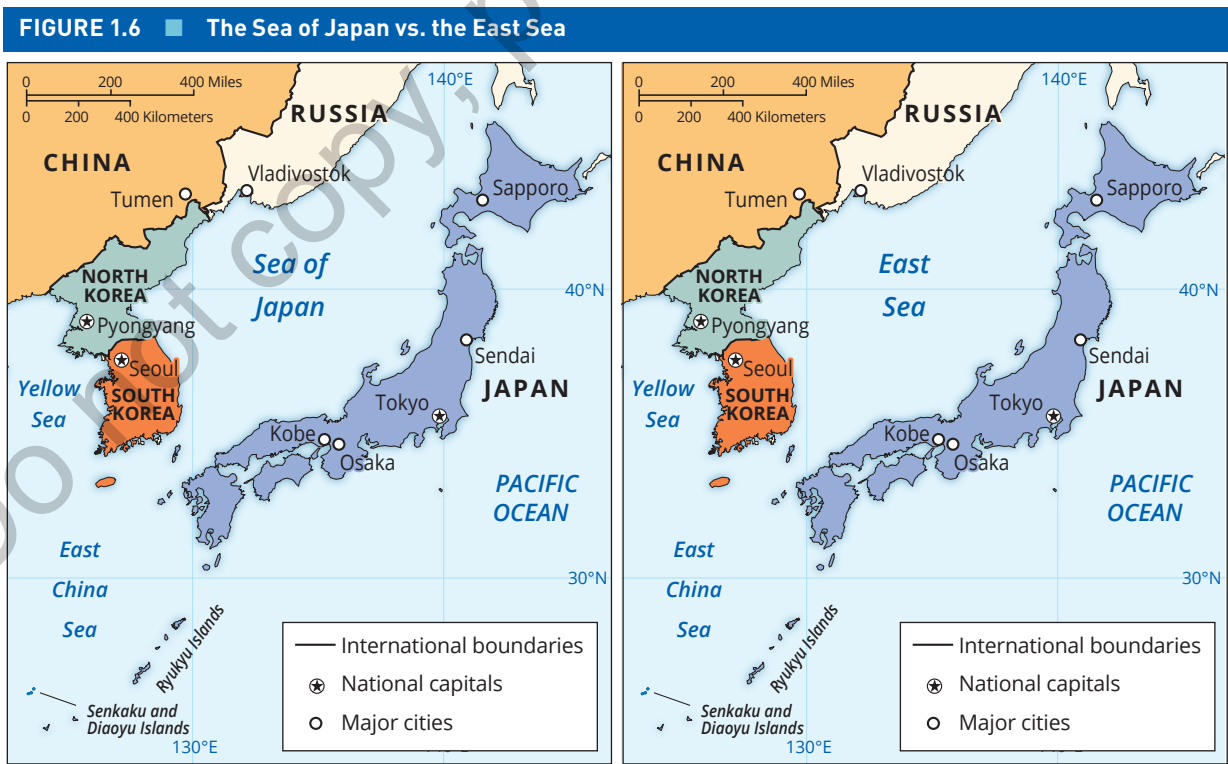
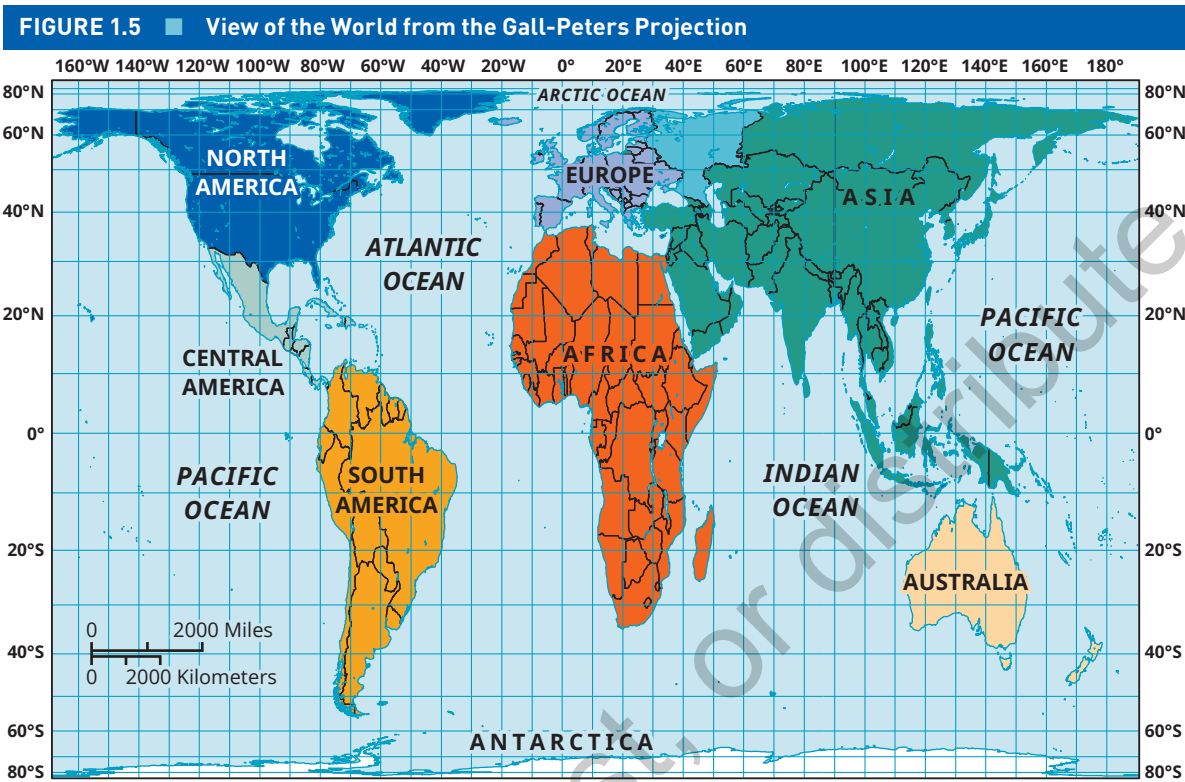
Maps also reflect the power of naming. Naming something and, more importantly, convincing others that a certain name should be used, directly influences how people think and what they value. It matters that the capital of the United States was named Washington, and not Hamilton or Pinckneyville. The new country chose to forever honor the unifying commander-in-chief of the Continental Army and not the controversial proponent of more centralized government, Alexander Hamilton, or the coauthor of the Fugitive Slave Clause in the U.S. Constitution, Charles Pinckney. In 1916, the city of Berlin in Ontario, Canada, was renamed Kitchener in the midst of World War I while Canadian armed forces fought Germany and Austria-Hungary on the side of Britain and its empire. Canadian citizens decided it was more patriotic to name the city after a British military commander, Herbert Kitchener, killed by a German mine, than after

FIGURE 1.4 ■ View of the World from the Mercator Projection

the capital of the enemy. It matters if you say “the West Bank” (by the way, of the Jordan River), “Palestine,” “occupied territories,” or “Judea and Samaria.” As Nadima pointed out to me, for her and for her friends the term *Palestine* validates the existence of a distinctive Palestinian people and implies their right to a homeland or nation-state, whereas West Bank is a geographical description without any such implications.

These naming issues show up on maps more often than you might realize. Many people across the world would recognize the body of water between the Japanese archipelago and the Asian mainland as the Sea of Japan. But some vehemently contest that naming, instead calling that same body of water the East Sea (see Figure 1.6).

The East Sea? East of what? Korea. Many Koreans have lobbied governments and book publishers around the world to use the name the East Sea and not the Sea of Japan. And Japanese authorities have lobbied back. Koreans argue that this is their traditional name for the body of water and that it is completely arbitrary to call it the Sea of Japan. Moreover, they point out that the name the Sea of Japan connotes Japanese “ownership” of this sea and that common international usage dates only from the time of Japanese imperialism in the late nineteenth and early



twentieth century. Indeed, Korea was a Japanese colony from 1905 until 1945, and Japanese colonization was brutal—razing ancient royal palaces, renaming cities (Seoul became Keijo), and forcing Japanese last names on people. Thus, in these actors' eyes, retaining the Sea of Japan name validates the horrible history of occupation and colonization. One increasingly sees the body of water referred to on international maps as "The Sea of Japan/East Sea."⁵

The politics of naming and boundary drawing has been a constant throughout human history. Readers might think these disputes are petty. But the people involved care deeply about them, and they have real life consequences. To take but one recent example: disputes in Charlottesville, Virginia, over the renaming of Lee Park to Emancipation Park in 2016 (and then to Market Street Park in 2018) and the planned removal of a Confederate statue in 2017 led to clashes between protesters and counter-protesters resulting in three deaths and more than thirty-eight injuries.⁶ Indeed, naming and mapping speak to the three most important concepts that structure this book: power, politics, and legitimacy.

POWER, POLITICS, AND LEGITIMACY

Power is a fundamental reality in all communities and in all contexts—a family, a business, or a nation-state. Power is the ability to get someone or something to do what you want. In its most extreme form, it is the ability to get someone to do your bidding even if it goes against the will of the other person. Often the use or threat of force, violence, or coercion is involved in compelling another; we often call this hard power.⁷ Nevertheless, there are many other forms of soft power where persuasion or emulation are involved.⁸ For instance, countries use the promise of increased incomes through trade to justify free trade agreements, or they can give cash payments to citizens to *persuade* people to modify their behavior. In Mexico, a program called *Oportunidades* provides payments to families if they make sure their children attend school or visit the doctor.⁹ Persuasion may not be necessary, however, when people from one country perceive another country as a model to follow. Many have argued that the power of the United States is increased because so many people around the world like what they perceive as the American way of life and seem to want to emulate it at home. Sometimes power is hard to recognize because it is concealed behind a commonly used name or is something considered traditional. This is why naming things matters so much. As we will see throughout this book, power in its hard and soft forms permeates every institution, policy, and group.

Politics is fundamentally about the definition and (peaceful) exercise of power. There are two main ways to define politics. Harold Lasswell famously defined politics as "who gets what, when, and how." But politics is not just about the distribution of money and material things like guns versus butter, whether or how long unemployment insurance exists, or how programs are to be financed. Politics is also about "the authoritative allocation of values" as another political scientist, David Easton, put it.¹⁰ In other words, politics is about which goals get endorsed and promoted, a process that determines policy outcomes. It is also about what a group even discusses and debates, determining what's on the agenda. A **value** is a deeply rooted mental attitude and can be defined as a "core conception of the desirable."¹¹ Values can change, but usually only slowly, and they motivate other attitudes and eventually behavior. In Easton's conception of politics, even before material goods (think of taxes, highways, or welfare payments) can be distributed, dominant values must be asserted. If a group prefers greater equality, then higher taxes and more redistribution from rich to poor will likely result. If a group is beholden to traditional religious norms, there will likely be less room for personal choice and individual liberty.

In reality, politics is about money and values, with the two conceptions intimately intertwined. To give an example, for a long time in many countries, only male property owners were

allowed to vote and participate in policymaking. Because we can safely assume that most people on at least one level act consistently in their own self-interest, such individuals, most of whom were rich, supported policies they benefitted from: policies that kept the size and scope of the state rather small, minimized property taxes, and relied on other forms of public income (tariffs, consumption taxes) paid by all. But these rules also showed that such societies placed a higher value on property ownership and male gender. Of course, we can never forget that the powerful created these values in the first place and have every incentive to maintain them. What is valued determines the rules, and the rules determine the actual policy, spending priorities, and so on.

This leads to the last big structuring concept: **legitimacy**. Essentially, legitimacy means that something or someone is accepted by individuals as just and right. When legitimacy exists, people are satisfied, accepting of their situation, perhaps even happy. People do not typically rebel against or try to subvert a system they think is legitimate. Legitimacy, which is ultimately a belief, creates stability, and without stability there is no order. Order—a semblance of security and predictability (as opposed to anarchy)—is the fundamental prerequisite for any human community to exist beyond the short term, let alone flourish.¹²

In the contemporary world, the state provides this fundamental security or order. States that lack legitimacy are unstable and, at the limit, can collapse. To return to the examples mentioned above, there came a point when many people no longer believed it was fair that only property-owning men could vote. They disrupted the political system through protests, strikes, even rebellions until their demands were met and legitimacy was restored. Nadima and many other Palestinians do not think their situation is fair or just. This lack of legitimacy has fueled discontent and violence in that region, which will likely not end until some semblance of legitimacy is achieved.

Of course, order can be imposed through brute force—hard power. But such systems are actually quite fragile and expensive to maintain. Prisons, police, armies, weapons, and walls are costly and come at the expense of other things the money could be spent on. Legitimacy—once achieved—is much cheaper and more sustainable. Thus, achieving and sustaining legitimacy—at least some legitimacy—is one of the most important tasks and continual challenges for political communities and their leaders. When a state or government is legitimate, that means the people under its sway will obey and comply with its policies. Laws are followed, taxes are paid, workers can do their jobs, social and economic life can flourish. Subsequent chapters will explore the many facets and dynamics of legitimacy in modern political systems.



Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was elected to a second (nonconsecutive) term in office after defeating incumbent Jair Bolsonaro. The ousting of Bolsonaro was considered by many around the world to be a victory for democracy and re-instilled confidence in the legitimacy of the Brazilian electoral process.

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POLITICAL SCIENCE AND ITS SUBFIELDS

In this chapter's introduction, we saw Nadima dealing directly in her daily life with power, politics, and legitimacy. Indeed, these concerns are constants throughout human history and in the present. There is a bewildering array of ways power can be wielded, channeled, or restrained—just like the many ways a political system can gain and maintain legitimacy or can tax and spend. At base, trying to make sense of this political diversity, trying to systematically understand, categorize, and explain power, politics, and legitimacy is exactly what political scientists do.

Political science is an expansive field because so much can affect who gets what, when, and how or determine the authoritative allocation of values. Moreover, the discipline borrows from and is influenced by many other fields such as history, sociology, psychology, area studies, cultural studies, and (these days especially) economics. In order to provide some structure, political science is broken down into subfields, which often overlap.

Political Theory, State Systems, and International Relations

The field of political theory looks at the big ideas and philosophies behind politics and government. Individual thinkers like Aristotle with his foundational work on constitutions and the ideal political community, Machiavelli with his concerns about power, Alexis de Tocqueville on civil society and democratic values, or Hannah Arendt on political action, power, and evil, are objects of study, as are various schools and traditions such as Confucianism, German idealism, critical theory, or postcolonialism. Theorists often look at the big moral and normative questions, such as the purposes to which a political community should work, the proper role for government, or what it means to be a political actor.

A second subfield is devoted to the study of the national political system, such as American government in the United States or Indian politics in India. This field often focuses on electoral and party politics and public policy within a given state. It usually employs sophisticated quantitative data and methods.

The subfield of international relations is about how political actors interact in inter/transnational spaces. Traditionally, this has involved the study of how sovereign entities such as empires or nation-states interact with each other: who dominates whom, alliance formation, and especially why they go to war or stay at peace. In recent decades, scholars have started to pay more attention to a wider variety of relevant actors. For example, researchers now study terrorist groups, actors such as ethnic groups or provinces of larger states, and private corporations as part of the subfield. Moreover, scholars have added analyses of how states interact in international, supranational, or transnational organizations such as the United Nations, the African Union, or the World Trade Organization—as well as how these entities themselves are organized and behave as actors. Classic international relations concerns have involved the assumption of an anarchic world (that is, no world government or police keeps order) and attempts on the part of various actors and organizations to create and manage order within this context. The causes and consequences of war and peace have also been key concerns.



The World Trade Organization is one of the most influential transnational organizations. Here, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, director general of the World Trade Organization (second left), and Sanda Ojiambo, assistant secretary-general of the UN Global Compact, (middle) participate in a discussion panel during the COP28, UN Climate Change Conference, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on December 3, 2023.

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Comparative Politics

Instead of looking at how political actors interact with each other in international spaces, **comparative politics** looks inside human communities and their political structures across the world. Comparativists are concerned with how power is exercised within a system, usually a nation-state, the institutions that groups have created to channel or check the exercise of power, and the policy outcomes of political systems, including understanding who gets what, when, and how. Also central to comparative study is how power is justified and how legitimacy is created and sustained.

Traditionally, comparativists had a regional (for instance, Latin America) or even country-specific (Soviet Union/Russia) focus—and many still do. However, scholars have increasingly moved to conceptual concerns—welfare states, democratization processes, contentious politics, and so on.

Above all, the subfield is comparative, meaning that we analyze, compare, and contrast political communities or phenomena. Comparison is fundamental to all systematic or scientific thinking and is one step beyond observation. Comparison shows how two or more things are alike or different—as well as generating questions as to why this may be the case. Russia is geographically expansive, but Cambodia is not—why is that? Why do people in Sweden have freedom of expression, but their counterparts in China do not? Alternatively, sometimes we start with questions and use comparisons to provide answers and explanations. Why have some countries been able to sustain stable democracies and others have not? We can compare the examples of Canada and Egypt to see. Why do some democratic systems like Italy have so many political parties in their parliaments, whereas others, like the United States, have only a few? What are the conditions that have led some countries like France to experience social and political revolutions whereas others like Japan have not? Why are some welfare states more generous than others?

The empirical object of study (i.e., observed reality) in comparative politics is the “case,” an example or occurrence of something, a unit of analysis, or a data point.¹³ Cases need to be defined or bounded based on some concept. Vietnam, Ghana, and Australia are examples of states. The election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil or Vladimir Putin in Russia are examples of presidential elections. The Chinese Communist Party or the Indian National Congress are examples of political parties. All of these are cases. We also often create categories of cases, such as welfare states, democracies, personal dictatorships, East Asia, sub-Saharan Africa or Latin America. The conceptual concern or methodological approach of the researcher will determine how cases are defined—but all comparativists use cases as objects of study or data points on one level.

The number of cases comparativists focus on may vary. Many influential works in the field have been single case studies, “the in-depth study of a single unit ... to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena.”¹⁴ For instance, David Laitin’s *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba* usefully outlined a model of cultural change by analyzing an ethnic group in Nigeria over time.¹⁵ Sometimes we engage in comparisons of a few number of cases—often called “small-N” studies, with “N” referring to the number of data points. Theda Skocpol’s *States and Social Revolutions* analyzed France, Russia, and China and the factors behind why social revolutions occurred in those cases.¹⁶ Other works are called “large-N” studies with dozens of cases or using massive survey-based databases with hundreds or thousands of data points. Here an example is Adam Przeworski et al.’s *Democracy and Development*, on the statistical relationships between a country’s level of economic development and democracy over a fifty-year period.¹⁷ There is a lot written on how cases should be selected to test various hypotheses and on the proper use of the comparative method for these kinds of approaches.¹⁸

Comparativists use many forms of data—observed facts and information about reality. Some use public opinion polls and statistics (numerical or quantitative data) that are amenable to many forms of statistical analysis. Others use interviews with political actors, their own observations, or archived documents like government reports, personal letters, or diplomatic communications. These latter forms are called qualitative data and are usually analyzed using more interpretive methods. There has always a divide between those who prefer quantitative data and methods and those who do more qualitative research—a divide that also structures this textbook. In reality, comparativists are often methodological pluralists, using a full array of qualitative and quantitative data sources and methods of analysis, as well as pragmatists—selecting the data and methods that are best suited to the research question and design.



Public opinion polling is one means of collecting data.

Janine Wiedel Photolibrary/Alamy Stock Photo

Whatever the forms of data comparativists approach their subjects with, we are all systematic, logical, and informed by theory and concepts. We are all interested in explaining various outcomes, testing hypotheses (a proposed explanation or best guess about an outcome or a relationship between variables), looking for correlations and covariation (how one variable is systematically affected or changed by another variable). At times, we can even achieve a statement about causality (x causes y), although this is extremely difficult given the complexity of political and social life.

Indeed, the study of politics and political outcomes can be messy and unexpected. Sometimes big events have little impact, and, in other cases, small, seemingly benign factors end up having massive impacts—like the eradication of wolves in Europe (see box below). In the end, we amass the most convincing evidence to provide answers to our research questions, substantiating a claim to knowledge. Indeed, we must always be humble with our conclusions—any kind of science is always tentative and open to change.¹⁹

Finally, comparative politics is also a set of concepts and theories that structure the way we study other countries. Core concerns covered in this book include the state; regime types, especially democracy (and democratization); civil society; presidential versus parliamentary systems; electoral and party systems; and political development. The field today encompasses many concepts, concerns, and approaches. Scholars of comparative political economy, for instance, have recently worked with a “varieties of capitalism” approach.²⁰ Those interested in the cultural underpinnings of political community have examined the components of a democratic political culture or the conditioning effects of history and collective memory. Some look at when and why people rebel or the conditions that can produce a revolution. Others have delved into the effects of natural resource dependence on political systems and outcomes, and still others study the emergence and performance of welfare states across the globe.

In short, comparative politics is a vibrant subfield that looks at a variety of cases and concepts that affect all aspects of political life. At times, it seems unwieldy. Comparativists do not have the structures or “discipline” of other subfields of political science—such as the focus on one national political system, a canon of great political thinkers (however constraining or contested this list is), or the big paradigms of international relations (realism, liberalism, constructivism).

Yet, however diverse the field is, all comparativists start with the same basic concerns—power, politics, and legitimacy—and an overriding interest in systematic explanations of political life around the world through various kinds of comparisons.

A CLOSER LOOK: SMALL CAUSES AND BIG EFFECTS: WHO'S AFRAID OF THE WOLVES OF EUROPE?

We have all heard the adage that everything is related to everything else. This is undoubtedly true on one level. But the job of researchers is to try to determine what is related the most, or what explains something the best—and to show the data and evidence that justify such statements. Sometimes a truly grand factor explains a phenomenon. If we are really successful, we can even figure out the causes. For instance, a veritable library full of books looks at how increased levels of development, resulting in higher per capita incomes, increases the likelihood that a democratic system will emerge and be sustained.

Sometimes, however, seemingly insignificant, even banal factors can have a massive impact on subsequent developments. One such factor is mentioned towards the beginning of Eugen Weber's masterful work, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*. In setting up this study, Weber describes “the way things were” before everything was transformed. In the mid-nineteenth century, the rural forests of premodern France were “vast and fearful.” This was one of the greatest barriers to development because people could literally not travel from one village to the next without fear of death. Such lack of contact and interaction isolated communities and entire regions so that dialects were sometimes incomprehensible fifty miles away. Trade, communication, and knowledge transfer were next to impossible with such limited mobility.

But what did people fear? Wolves and feral dogs were omnipresent, attacking travelers and damaging stocks of sheep and other farm animals. Most threateningly, however, they often carried rabies, a potentially fatal disease that premodern medicine was not yet capable of treating or vaccinating against. Humans had tried in vain for centuries to eradicate the menace. Weber writes that eradication was successful around the city of Orleans by 1850, but in many other areas, like Brittany, the threat persisted until around 1900. “For city dwellers, the wolf was a storybook character ... but for people over great portions of France, he was a howling in the night, a disquieting presence not far off.”²¹

Not surprisingly, the danger of the wolf was deeply embedded within the premodern European and, particularly, French psyche. This is particularly clear by the presence of wolves in cultural elements such as folklore and fairy tales. Probably the most famous fairy tale wolf is that of *Little Red Riding Hood*. It is believed that the first versions of this story (*Le Petit Chaperon Rouge*) appeared in France or Belgium around the tenth or eleventh century as a short poem, and the extended story was first written down by the Frenchman Charles Perrault in the 1600s and popularized by the Brothers Grimm in the 1800s.



Medieval Europeans' fear of wolves is perhaps best exemplified in the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood*.

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It was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century that technological and political factors put an end to the wolf problem, which had impeded development. Noisy new railroads and highways scared the beasts away from traveled areas. Improvements in engineering and chemistry (through the development of more effective firearms and poison) allowed for easier hunting. Medicines to fight rabies were developed, notably a vaccine developed by Louis Pasteur. Finally, and most relevant to political development, a new bounty system was instituted by the strengthened French state. In 1883, the first year of the program, 1,316 wolves were cashed in for payment; in 1900, the success of the program meant that only 115 were submitted.

France did not truly unify until the wolf problem was solved, which led to wolves becoming officially extinct in the 1930s. In a development that would horrify previous generations, the French government and the European Union have been trying for decades to reintroduce wolves as part of contemporary conservation practices. Since 2007, wolves have special protections, and since the 1990s wolves have returned to more than half of the country (including sightings in the Paris region), albeit concentrated in the Alps. And in a great example of history repeating itself, shepherds have lost tens of thousands of sheep over the last twenty years. The government now even allows a certain number of wolves to be culled (shot) every year. Luckily, however, there have not been any human fatalities to add to the nearly 8,000 deaths by wolf recorded from the fourteenth century to 1918.²²

Discussion Questions

1. Would you agree that the threat of wolves and feral dogs was a hindrance to economic and political development? Do you think the eradication campaign had a realistic alternative?
2. Can you think of any similar, seemingly banal threats in other regions of the world that impeded forms of human development?

FOR REVIEW

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a critical and in-depth discussion of maps and the politics of naming. Such disputes are legion but speak to core concerns of politics, namely the exercise of power. Next, it examined the core conceptual concerns of political life—power, politics, and legitimacy. Those who study these concepts are political scientists and the political scientists who examine the political systems of countries around the world from a comparative perspective with a variety of data and methods are involved in comparative politics. This book serves as an introduction to the field of comparative politics.

KEY TERMS

comparative politics
legitimacy
maps
Mercator projection

Gall-Peters projection
Politics
power
value

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why does it matter whether we call a place Bombay or Mumbai? Leningrad or Saint Petersburg? Denali or Mount McKinley?
2. What is the best definition of politics?
3. Why is legitimacy important to states?
4. How is comparative politics different from other subfields in political science such as international relations?

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2

THE STATE AND ITS FUNCTIONS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 Articulate the basic definition of the state and the key issues of *stateness*.
- 2.2 Explain how the state differs from governments and regimes.
- 2.3 Describe modern revisions to Weber's definition of the state.
- 2.4 Discuss the importance and types of legitimacy.
- 2.5 Explain why the European and not the Chinese state dominated the world.

What would happen if there were no state or if a state collapsed? Many people might fantasize that some sort of paradise would result if the modern state ceased to exist. The reality is actually much more of a nightmare. Russia in the 1990s is a recent example of exactly what happens when the state almost disappears.

The Soviet Union—a large, multiethnic Eurasian state ruled as a communist dictatorship after the demise of the Russian Empire in 1917—bankrupted itself over the course of the Cold War and ceased to exist in December 1991. Its twelve constituent republics, including Estonia and Kazakhstan, became independent states, with Russia by far the largest. On the surface, it seemed like Russian state institutions continued to function after the upheaval. The country had a parliament, president, tax authority, intelligence agencies, and army. Just behind the façade of continuity, however, the Russian state essentially collapsed. I remember reading articles from that time stating that soldiers and police officers were not paid for months on end. (And if there is just one thing I have learned from political history it is that soldiers and police really ought to be paid on time.) In the midst of a transition to a capitalist and market-based system, the economy contracted by 40 percent between 1991 and 1998 and only surpassed its 1991 size in 2004. By 1994, life expectancy at birth declined—especially for men—to levels not seen since the 1940s and only regained its mid 1980s peak in the early 2010s. Alcoholism was rampant. The crime rate spiked.¹

But life must go on. At a minimum, people need to go to the market to buy food. Vendors need to be able to sell their wares. There must be a semblance of order and peace for this to happen. In Russia, criminal gangs and mafia organizations stepped into the void created by the collapse of the state. They set up what Vadim Volkov calls “protection rackets” in which they demanded payment from individuals or businesses and in return would offer a degree of security for their clients.² Many of these groups and their leaders, soon called oligarchs, were also able to enrich themselves by gaining control over former state-owned companies once they were privatized.

This system actually worked for a while and a degree of order was established. But this order came at a price. Random violence has always accompanied unregulated organized crime. The services offered were nowhere near what states provide—education, healthcare, infrastructure, pensions, and so on. In the absence of state regulation, markets cannot work rationally or efficiently. Corruption—private gain at public expense—was everywhere. And the very existence of protection rackets made it more difficult for the state to tax people and provide public services.

This was the situation that empowered Vladimir Putin when he came to power in 1999 through 2000. He was, in Harold Lasswell’s term, a restorer of order.³ He crushed the mafia, fought the oligarchs (at least the unfriendly ones), and increased revenue, throwing in a healthy dose of nationalism. In so doing, he not only rebuilt the Russian state but also reconstructed a perception of legitimacy, a sense that things are just and right. The economy grew again; life expectancies increased; the standard of living improved. Even though Putin has overstayed his welcome, engaged in aggressive war, especially after 2014 in Ukraine, and himself created a deeply corrupt unfree system based on censorship, surveillance, propaganda, violence, and personal proximity to the leader, many Russians continue to support him. When states fail, they must be reconstructed.

DEFINING THE STATE

The **state** is the most fundamental modern political institution. It has tremendous effects on all aspects of political life and is, thus, a key focus of comparative politics. But what is a state exactly? How can it be defined? Probably the most influential and certainly the most

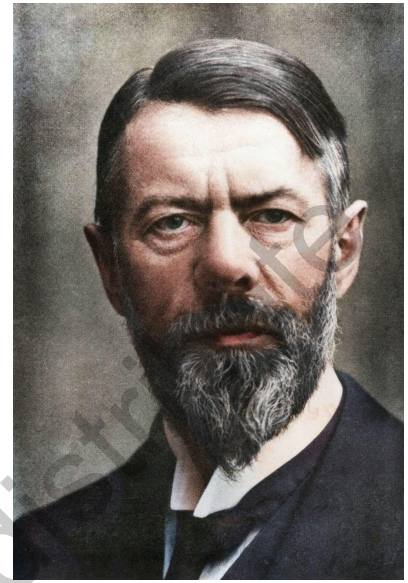
used definition comes from German scholar Max Weber (1864–1920), who defined a state as “a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”⁴ Stability and order flow from the state’s monopoly of the use of force. It allows states to defend against external threats—invasion from other states, terrorism, piracy, and even pestilence and disease—as well as to create internal order—ensuring that people are secure in their daily lives by fighting criminality and other domestic threats to stability.

Weber’s definition, however, does not just end with the monopoly of force. For him, the state also needs to achieve compliance from the people over which it is asserting power. It also must compel certain actions, at a minimum getting people to obey laws and refrain from engaging in criminal behavior, pay taxes, and serve in the armed forces when eligible so that the basic order function of the state can be fulfilled. Here we also see Weber’s distinctive approach. It is not only the monopoly of force that matters; a state should also be legitimate, that is, it should be accepted as just and right by the population. The foundations of Weber’s concept of legitimacy are discussed below.

The Importance of Order

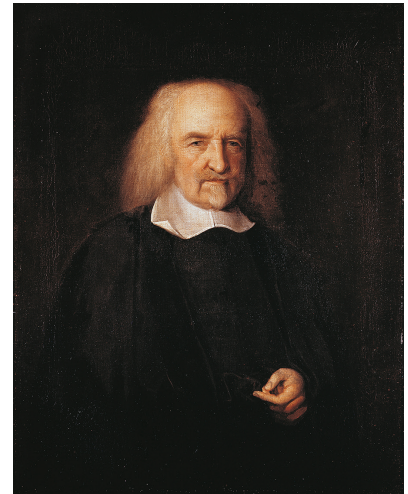
Order and stability make human communities possible, coming before any other political concern or institutional choice. Like so many other thinkers, Weber was influenced by Thomas Hobbes, the seventeenth-century English writer and witness to the destructive English Civil War who wrote about the necessity of a “Leviathan,” a reference to the all-powerful sea monster described in the Bible’s Old Testament. Hobbes argued that, as with the mythical creature, without a powerful sovereign above and beyond any other actor, there would be anarchy, in which life would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” Essentially, communities need an actor with superior coercive power that can vanquish any other threats or scare people into not contesting power and in general behaving.⁵ But, Hobbes, like Weber, also argued that people would voluntarily and rationally give up some of their powers from the state of nature as part of a mutual agreement. Such a social contract or a constitution would also bind the sovereign state that held the monopoly of force to a set of legal rules that would regulate and restrain its behavior.⁶

Fundamentally, therefore, states provide order by being able to overpower all other contenders. When functioning well, this power is accepted by the people it affects as the price they pay for stability. Often, states have challenges fulfilling this basic task. When a state’s power is disrupted or contested, we speak of a country as having **stateness issues**. Many countries around the world have serious problems of order in which the state does not have the monopoly on the legitimate use of force. As mentioned above, in Russia, the state almost vanished in the early 1990s. Pensioners (retirees) were not paid. Crime and corruption flourished as organized criminal gangs stepped in to provide a semblance of security and “protection.”⁷ In Afghanistan before the withdrawal of western powers in 2021, the central government (with a big assist from the U.S. military) exerted control only over about half of the territory. Warlords and terrorist groups like the



German scholar Max Weber had a significant influence on our modern definition of the state.

SPCOLLECTION/Alamy Stock Photo



English philosopher Thomas Hobbes discussed the importance of order in human societies.

DE AGOSTINI PICTURE LIBRARY/Contributor/Getty Images

Taliban controlled the rest. Even after the Taliban took over again, the state is hardly functional, and the country has been facing a protracted humanitarian disaster. Countries without a functioning or high-quality state can experience civil strife, problems with the quality of democracy, or persistent poverty, famine or disease. Almost always, these are typically the product of the much deeper stateness issues.

As with any definition—an abstraction of ideal characteristics—there are some complications surrounding the notion of a monopoly of force. What does the monopoly of force actually mean in practice? Does it mean only representatives of the state (army, police, security services) may have guns, weapons, or other coercive devices? Does it mean there could be other power holders with coercive potential (non-state militias, individual citizens), but the state is simply stronger? How does one ensure the state has a preponderance of coercive means? And, how do citizens ensure the state will not abuse its power? Given the importance of achieving state power and the variation among many countries in the quality or legitimacy of states, as well as the practical challenge of defining what the state's monopoly of force means in different contexts, such issues have always been central to the study of comparative politics, and they will be explored throughout this book.

The Importance of Boundaries

Equally key to the definition of the state is Weber's condition that a state must exist "within a given territory." This speaks to the crucial aspect of borders. A state must define, delimit, or determine a space before it can attempt to create a monopoly of violence (that is, control or wield power) over it. If the boundaries are porous, ill-defined, or contested, the attempted monopoly will be ineffectual. "Good fences make good neighbors," as Robert Frost ironically put it. Also important is that people have to accept and recognize state boundaries as legitimate. Some thinkers define a state simply as a political entity whose borders are internationally recognized.

States have always had a problem with open borders or a frontier of settlement. They cannot properly establish a monopoly of force, including taxing people to pay for an army or police force, if people can run away to regions where the state's reach is minimal. Put-upon Russian peasants and common criminals were constantly trying to escape to the frontiers of settlement in the Urals or Siberia as Russia expanded eastward after the eighteenth century. The Chinese, and much later the East Germans, built a massive wall in part to keep the people inside it so they could tax them. The United States has traditionally had a smaller state than many other countries because of the frontier and ease of escape from more established settled areas. If the state tried to over-tax residents, they would simply move to evade the state's power.

Equally disruptive is when a group decides that it does not want to be part of a larger state—like the (Catholic) Irish in the United Kingdom in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries or the Eritreans in Ethiopia, the Kosovars in Serbia, and the East Timorese in Indonesia in the later twentieth century.

Moreover, territory contested between rival states will be a cause of strife and disorder. Indeed, most of the bloody history of modern Europe can be attributed to centuries-long battles over defining borders, especially where few natural boundaries exist (as between Germany and Poland or Russia and Ukraine). Many of the stateness issues in the developing world today are due to arbitrary, unnatural borders imposed by European colonizers (who loved straight lines). Such arbitrary borders have divided similar groups that would probably like to be in

one political system, such as the Pashtun people currently divided between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Colonial powers also included different groups that might have preferred separate systems, such as the various tribes and religious groupings in Nigeria. Arbitrary borders have been particularly problematic in Africa and the Middle East/South Asia.

A CLOSER LOOK: WHY ARE BORDERS SO STRAIGHT IN AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST?

There is a story that, in 1921, a youngish Winston Churchill was involved in determining the border between what is now Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Having drunk too much alcohol at lunch, when he went to draw on the map, his pen inadvertently zigged instead of going straight, carving out a bizarre triangular parcel of land for the Saudis. This is known as Winston's hiccup or Churchill's cough. The story—told enthusiastically by Churchill himself—is almost certainly false, but it speaks to a greater truth about the capriciousness of European powers in drawing colonial borders.⁸

We would like to think that borders evolve or shift to encompass the heritage and preferences of the peoples living in an area, reflecting the salient ethnic, linguistic, or religious identities of a group. This was not always the case with the African continent and the Middle East where modern state borders were instead arbitrarily defined by European colonial negotiation.

The contemporary demarcation of states within the African continent actually dates to the nineteenth century. The 1884–1885 Berlin Conference marked the beginning of an intensification of European colonialism in Africa. German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck had called a conference, insisting it was in keeping with international law, in order to divide up the continent of Africa; yet no Africans were invited to attend. Instead, the three-month long conference was made up of representatives from thirteen European powers, the United States, and the Ottoman Empire. Today, many African studies scholars view the Berlin Conference as the prelude to the enduring crises facing the African continent to the present.⁹

Most of the states currently in existence on the African continent were drawn within a few years of the conference, created along geographic criteria such as mountain ranges, rivers, and latitudes and longitudes in order to denote the various boundaries of the competing colonial powers. The European powers drew about 30 percent of the border lengths along straight lines,¹⁰ often separating naturally existing boundaries which occurred according to lines of ethnicity or heritage. The colonial powers also drew boundary lines through every tenth ethnic minority group on the continent, for example dividing the 7 million Kikongo speakers.¹¹ Had the borders been drawn along linguistic lines, this geographic area could be its own country. Instead, these speakers are split between three nations, Angola (formerly a Portuguese colony), the Congo (France), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire, Belgium).¹² Although some scholars conclude that the “artificial border” thesis is overblown and that all borders are social constructs and hence somehow arbitrary, it is quite likely that the map of African states would look quite different had the European colonial powers not intervened (as Figure 2.1 shows).

In the Middle East, a similar process occurred. A few years before Churchill got involved, two diplomats, Mark Sykes of Great Britain and François Georges-Picot of France, demarcated the modern Middle East into spheres of influence during World War I in 1916. The Sykes-Picot Plan was secretly concluded in order to prepare for the envisioned dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, which had controlled much of the Middle East since the sixteenth century. According to the agreement, Iran, Transjordan, and Palestine moved into British control, and Syria and Lebanon went under French influence. Additionally, the plan

FIGURE 2.1 ■ What Africa Might Have Looked Like Without Colonization.

Adapted from Benjamin Denison and Andrew Lebovich. "This is not the Middle Eastern order you are looking for." *The Washington Post*. June 9, 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/06/09/this-is-not-the-middle-eastern-order-you-are-looking-for/>.

This hypothetical map is constructed by projecting precolonial political systems, as well as ethnic, tribal, or religious pluralism into the present.

drew the Levant borderlines with a ruler, dividing the states by sect. In this scheme, Lebanon was Christian and Syria had a large Sunni Muslim population. Unlike the intertwined tribes of the African continent, the sects mostly lived apart from one another despite the vast amount of trade.¹³

Partition based upon geographic and not ethnic or religious realities has likely increased conflicts. While independence could have been an opportunity to redraw borders according to other criteria, this would have potentially created more disruptions. Since the wave of African independence in the 1960s, states formerly belonging to different colonial powers hardly experienced any interstate conflicts. The vast majority of conflicts have been fueled by domestic strife. One example can be found in Rwanda. In the nineteenth century, Rwandan ethnic allegiances were more flexible than in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries, where it was possible to switch social groups from being a member of the majority Hutus to the minority Tutsis. During colonial rule, these groupings were formally divided as ethnic groups. Moreover, Belgian colonists, like European powers in many other African countries, rather arbitrarily chose the Tutsis to be the dominant ethnic group. Resentments and rising tensions eventually contributed to genocide in 1994, one of the worst in human history in

which as many as 1 million (mainly Tutsis) were murdered.¹⁴ Borders clearly matter. When they lack legitimacy, tragedies can happen.

Review Questions

1. What do you think are the best criteria to draw state borders?
2. Who should be the decision-makers for state boundaries?
3. Are you convinced that externally imposed arbitrary borders helped to cause strife in many regions around the world?

As a rule of thumb, the more defined and accepted as legitimate borders are, the smaller the state is. During the period of state formation, island states like Britain and Japan could manage without a large army, which has always been a key and expensive priority of states. Their defensive needs were much less because it was so difficult for any external power to attack. A similar argument has been made for the United States, surrounded on two sides by oceans and having smaller, usually peaceful states to the north and south. If external attack is difficult or unlikely, then there is much less need to tax citizens to pay for greater defensive capability. By contrast, the German states of the nineteenth century—Prussia in particular—with few natural barriers needed a massive army backed up by a strong state to defend their very existence from external attack.

DIFFERENTIATING THE STATE: DURATION AND SCALE

Recall that one of the core reasons we compare is to better define something by looking at contrasting examples. We can understand something by looking at what it is not. In this context, several other core political institutions in modern political systems can be usefully contrasted to the state.

Two of them, governments and regimes, can be distinguished from states by their duration. **Governments** are the current power holders within states. Think of the tenure of Narendra Modi and his BJP party in India, or the series of multiparty coalitions Angela Merkel led in Germany from 2005 until 2021. These are the least institutionalized forms, meaning they are not supposed to last forever. In modern democracies, governments last four to five years and are replaced through elections (even if the incumbent politicians are reelected). In personal dictatorships or (absolute) monarchies, the life of the government is tied to the life of the leader—so usually a maximum of fifty years after gaining power as a young adult—but even here the courtiers, minions, or ministers who wield substantial power might change quite a bit.

Regimes, the time-specific relationship between rulers and ruled or the system of fundamental rules that determine and regulate power, are of a medium level of institutionalization. They persist longer than governments; in fact, the democratic regime of the United States has lasted for almost 250 years. However, regimes can be changed and modified to an extent. Indeed, rules are constantly revised and evolve.

States, by contrast, are maximally institutionalized—they are built to last for eternity. Their basic structures change very little, even if there is movement on the surface (bureaucratic reorganizations, for instance). To understand how institutionalized states are, notice how little the command structure of an army has evolved over the centuries, despite massive innovations in weapons technology. The payment of taxes or the keeping of financial records are also fundamental state tasks that will always exist in some form or another. In fact, some have argued, writing was invented about 7,000 years ago precisely to assess and record taxes.¹⁵

Another differentiating factor for modern states is their organizational scale compared to other political communities. In the ancient world, two basic political forms existed: the empire and the city-state. Both had advantages and disadvantages. The city state had the advantage of small size. In Ancient Greece, the limits of a city-state were typically one day's walk from the central public space (agora). All the citizens (male and not enslaved) personally knew each other. The intensive communication created a level of trust, identity, and solidarity—in short, legitimacy—that was a big advantage in governance or war-making. However, its small size also meant that it had constrained or unique resources.

By contrast, empires are by definition geographically expansive and contain many disparate areas. The resource base is massive and diverse, but it is quite difficult for the central ruler to maintain control over geographically distant and often culturally distinctive peripheries. The ruler must employ trusted deputies to rule in these remote regions—but even the most trusted lieutenant, such as a brother or son, might savor independence and endeavor to break away from the distant capital. Maintaining control has always been the Achilles' heel of empires. Increasingly independent and eventually rebellious regions are exactly what has brought down most empires—such as the Roman or Ottoman Empires.



At its peak, the Ottoman Empire spanned parts of southeastern Europe through western Asia and northern Africa.

British Library/GRANGER

City-states, kingdoms, and empires were the dominant types of political systems until the rise of the modern state. The modern state is a mid-level political organization that takes on the advantages while avoiding the disadvantages of ancient political forms. It is large enough to have a sufficient and diverse resource base, but not so large as to lose control over the peripheries. It is still small enough to create a cohesive identity and foster intensive communication, trust, and legitimacy. This advantageous middle position is one reason for the modern state's resilience.

Scholars have tried to assess the ideal size of nations, in which economic performance, state tasks, and societal cohesion are maximized. Alberto Alesina, for instance, has argued that there is a cost-benefit trade-off between economies of scale—that more can be produced for cheaper with greater size and extent—and the costs of heterogeneity—that it becomes more difficult to find a satisfactory policy when something is too large and diverse.¹⁶ Many states like Japan or Thailand have close to the ideal balance, whereas some entities like the European Union may not be ideally situated because they are simply too diverse to ever find a policy that will make most people happy.

In reality, of course, states are of varying populations and geographical sizes. Micro-states resemble the city-states of old—Luxembourg, Singapore, or Barbados come to mind. Not to mention Liechtenstein: There are as many people (37,000) in the sleepy eastern German town of Suhl as in that entire country. Luxembourg's population is about the same as Toronto suburb Brampton, Ontario. These micro-states are not the norm; they are historical artifacts from older phases of development. No one has ever won a political or economic argument by citing Aruba as an example. Conversely, some states stretch across continents with very diverse populations—the United States and Russia are examples. Therefore, a state's middling size is more of a conceptual point. Yet, note that the larger states have all grappled with issues arising from large size and heterogeneity and have had to find ways to cope. Russian rulers have typically tried to coercively repress diversity (for instance, in the case of ethnic Chechens and Tatars, both of which are majority Muslim), whereas the United States and India have embraced various ways of dividing and sharing power through federalism as a method to allow for different policy preferences to pertain in various regions of the country.

AN UPDATED DEFINITION: REGULATION AND ADMINISTRATION

Recent scholars have argued that the Weberian definition of the state, which focuses so much on the monopoly of force, is dated. They argue that it corresponds to an era very different from the twenty-first century, to a level of economic and political development that no longer exists, and a set of much lower citizen expectations. Weber wrote in the early twentieth century, before the real creation or expansion of comprehensive welfare programs such as public pensions, unemployment insurance, or healthcare insurance. Indeed, the role of the state was minimal—it provided only basic regulation, a legal system, and security. Scholars sometimes classify this more minimal state as a “night watchman” state that fulfills only basic security and regulatory functions.¹⁷

Today, however, it is not sufficient to define states primarily on the basis of their coercive power. Recent authors have tried to revise the definition of the state to incorporate the many other things states now do in the century since Weber wrote. Michael Mann, for instance, focuses on the state's administrative and bureaucratic elements. For him, the state is first a distinct set of institutions and personnel in which various functions are carried out by specialists. The state is also centralized, insofar as power and rulemaking extend to and from a capital city over a defined territory. All of this is backed up by organized physical force.¹⁸ In Mann's formulation, the coercive role of the state is the last element mentioned, almost an afterthought. Another author, Margaret Levi writes that the state concentrates violence and coordinates regulation.¹⁹ Putting it this way gets around the problem of defining what exactly a monopoly of force actually means in practice.



As evidenced by the numerous departments that make up the United States federal government, modern states have a distinct set of institutions and personnel in which various functions are carried out by specialists.

iStockphoto.com/JTSorrell

Finally, Francis Fukuyama writes that modern states make policy decisions based on technical specialization and expertise—in short, decisions made by professionals.²⁰ He also thinks states need to be relatively independent from various interest groups. Well-functioning states cannot make policy to benefit a small, influential segment of the population. Otherwise, the impartiality of the state is compromised, and citizen support along with legitimacy will fall. On this point, communist writer Karl Marx and those working in the Marxist intellectual tradition thought that the state was and continues to be subordinate to and biased in favor of the dominant capitalist interests. It is the “executive committee of the bourgeoisie.”²¹

These more recent definitions emphasize centralized administration, welfare programs, and policymaking as equal to or perhaps even more important than the coercive and security functions of contemporary states. They do a better job of defining what states today actually are. However, as much as they usefully move beyond Weber’s definition, all authors agree with Weber that the state is merely an institutional shell—a highly efficient set of institutions and practices, to be sure. States have no intrinsic goal to which they are pledged, no legitimacy generated from within. This is to say that something external must legitimize states so that citizens will accept state power as just and right. Legitimacy comes from sources independent of and outside of state institutions. And, once again, it is Weber who wrote first about legitimacy. It is to his three forms of legitimacy we now turn.

MAX WEBER ON THE ROLE OF IDEAS AND LEGITIMACY

In addition to Weber’s foundational work on the state, his thoughts on the role of ideas and legitimacy have also been highly influential for the study of comparative politics. He was one of the first to take religious belief systems seriously as a crucial influence on cultural, political, and economic outcomes. In his most famous work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he argued that the modern, industrialized, and capitalist economy had its origins in Protestant Christian theological innovations, particularly in the Calvinist theory of the “calling.”²² Essentially, this innovative belief was that the more one worked and the more wealth one amassed, the more God’s will was being done, and, thus, the stronger one’s certainty could be of

going to heaven. This “world-affirming” theology was a real departure from other more traditional, “world-rejecting” doctrines that looked down on wealth accumulation, encapsulated by the famous New Testament observation, “Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of needle, than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God.”²³ Weber showed how important these changes in religious ideas were to the emergence of the modern world and the modern state.²⁴

Weber also wrote extensively about the justifications for political authority or legitimacy. In Chapter 1, we defined legitimacy as a belief that something is just and right. Legitimacy matters because a fully, or at least sufficiently, legitimized system is stable. Some—certain revolutionaries or those oppressed by forms of domination masked by stable tradition—would argue with this point and might even advocate that some sort of disruption is necessary for progress to occur. Disruption is, however, very difficult to manage, unpredictable, and often leads to human misery.²⁵ With these important caveats in mind, stability is the fundamental goal and context of any human community.

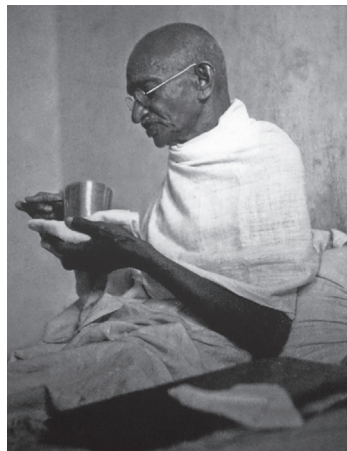
Alternatives to Legitimacy

There are two alternatives to a legitimate order. One is disorder, violence, and anarchy—obviously undesirable. The other is an order imposed by brute force. Recall the definition of power—getting people to do something they would not necessarily choose to do, like paying taxes. You can intimidate and force people to do something. But if you think about how much it costs to pay for weapons and security personnel, these measures are actually quite expensive over the long haul. Of course, such methods of control are surprisingly common and resilient in history and the present, especially if a regime has a lifeline with external support. Fidel Castro’s Cuba after 1959 is an example, as for many decades it had external support from the communist Soviet Union. More recently, both Venezuela and North Korea’s governments are held together with help from China and Russia. But, there comes a point when the leaders of such a coercive system will bankrupt themselves (like the Soviet Union) or when the discontent becomes so overwhelming that the leaders of such a system can literally no longer rule through such harsh means (the French Revolution and the overthrow of the monarchy). Legitimacy is much cheaper and more humane in the long run. Moreover, even the most coercive systems, such as Nazi Germany, also invested in forms of legitimacy like nationalism.

Types of Legitimacy

According to Weber, there are three types of legitimacy. First, **traditional legitimacy** is based on how things have always been historically—values, institutions, and practices that are inherited from previous generations. Notions of monarchy and aristocracy, or in many contexts, clan or tribal loyalties, are key. This type of legitimacy is infused with traditional religious beliefs and the various political and social roles are justified by religion, exemplified by the divine right of kings. Finally, there is often a magical or supernatural worldview in which people believe in angels, demons, saints, miracles, and so on, as forces active in the world and as explanations for events. For example, when the Black Death killed millions of Europeans in the fourteenth century, many people thought that this plague was divine retribution for sinful populations.

Second is **charismatic legitimacy**, which is based on the motivational power and appeal of an individual leader. Basically, a system will be accepted as just and right if the leader or founder puts forth a convincing doctrine and has appealing personal traits that can inspire devotion and compliance from followers. There are, of course, many kinds of charisma unique to a time and place. Leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and Napoleon, but also Fidel Castro and Adolf Hitler are examples of such charismatic leaders.



Indian social movement leader Mahatma Gandhi (left) and Cuban dictator Fidel Castro (right) are two opposing examples of charismatic leadership.

Universal History Archive/Contributor/Getty Images

Jorge Rey/Stringer/Getty Images

Finally, there is **bureaucratic or rational-legal legitimacy**. This form is based on a rule of law that was transparently created and justified based on logical and rational principles. For instance, all adults are considered rational beings and thus should all have the right to participate in public life through voting or running for office. All citizens are equal under the law and are treated equally by the legal and political system—the bureaucracies of the modern state. In a sense, this type flows from the impartial enforcement of general principles or constitutional precepts.

There is one more way of thinking about legitimacy—output versus procedural legitimacy. **Output legitimacy** means that people are satisfied with the performance of a program, policy, or institution. If schools are educating students well, preparing them for modern jobs, and doing so at a good price, we would say that the output legitimacy is high. By contrast, if a police force is not able to catch criminals or prevent crime—or if its treatment of different segments of the population is discriminatory—output legitimacy would be low. Any institution or political system can possess this type of legitimacy at any time. Nowadays, at the level of the political systems, output legitimacy is usually associated with the state of the economy. As long as economic growth continues with (good enough) jobs for almost all and rising incomes or standards of living (incomes might not increase so much, but increased government revenue might pay for better healthcare or education), most leaders are in good shape. But when the good times end, there must be some other form of legitimacy to fall back on.

That's where **process, input or procedural legitimacy**, a belief that the system itself is just and fair. Procedures must be transparent and treat everyone equally. How decisions are made must be clear, and interested people must have the opportunity to affect the decision-making process or at least understand how decisions are made. This type comes very close to Weber's rational-legal form of legitimacy. Countries can sometimes rely on output legitimacy for decades—China has had more than 6 percent and often 12 or 15 percent economic growth from the 1990s to the early 2020s. But when the good times come to an end, as they always eventually do, what then? This is exactly when the system must rely on other forms of legitimacy to maintain its overall stability.

How Forms of Legitimacy Evolve and Endure

Several additional points and implications flow from our initial discussion of legitimacy. A system cannot be built or institutionalized in the medium or long term on charismatic authority

alone because it is so radically tied to a specific individual. Charisma cannot be inherited—even though the relatives or successors of prophets, kings, and dictators certainly try. For example, Raúl Castro in Cuba was not inspiring like his brother Fidel. Charisma must be disconnected from an individual and generalized or institutionalized—and thus could evolve into a pillar of traditional legitimacy. Weber called this process **routinization** and thought that many founders of religions were quintessential charismatic leaders. To survive for the long-term, Christianity needed the Apostle Peter, the popes, and the entire bureaucratic hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Islam needed the Prophet Mohammed's successors Abu Bakr, Ali, and the later caliphs who applied Mohammed's revelations to actual practice and who codified the Islamic way of life.

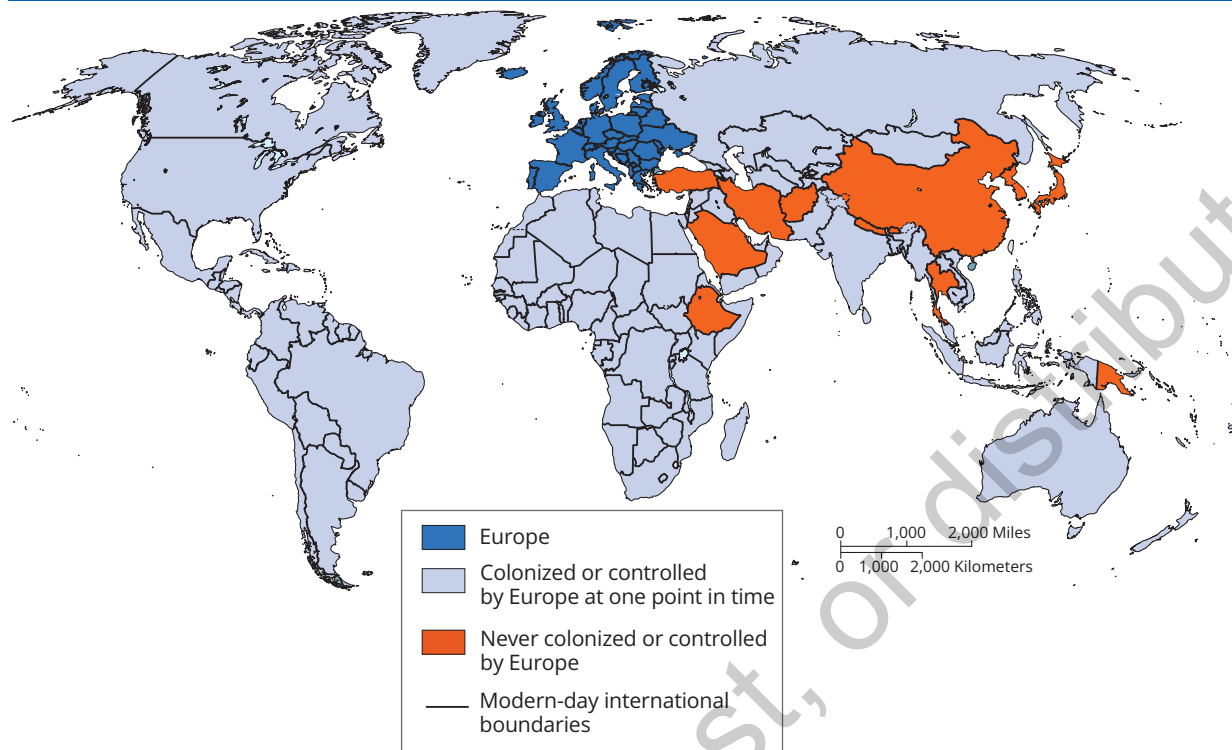
In addition, the last few centuries have witnessed major changes to human society that have made the basis for traditional legitimacy much harder or perhaps even impossible to sustain. Weber called these processes **rationalization**, or the “disenchantment of the world.”²⁶ Thanks to such changes as greater literacy and education, people no longer believed that their social and economic situation was determined by a divine will. They stopped believing in the divine right of kings, or that a higher being proclaimed that one would be a peasant, engage in backbreaking work, and die young, or that someone's untimely death was the result of sin. Instead, most people today accept that there are a variety of complex reasons and human-created causes behind social positions; or that there is a scientific explanation behind disease or natural disasters. In short, people think much more rationally and scientifically. Moreover, there is also a kind of humpty-dumpty situation—that once traditional forms of legitimacy have fallen by the wayside, people will not again be beholden to such beliefs. For example, many Japanese people used to believe the typhoon that prevented an invasion from Kublai Khan in 1281 was a *kamikaze*, or divine wind, sent by the protective Japanese gods to save the country. Modern science has shown definitively that there are no supernatural causes behind such tropical storms. Few Japanese people would accept this belief today.

In sum, charismatic legitimacy is fleeting and is intimately connected to an individual. An institutionalized system expected to last for the long-term cannot be built on this form of legitimacy because it ends with the death of the person. Traditional legitimacy eroded over time and eventually was inadequate. Better education and the general increase in scientific knowledge made it impossible for people to believe in many traditional structures and justifications for societal conditions. Thus, under modern circumstances, only rational-legal legitimacy is really an option to legitimize a system. According to Weber, however, this situation is also fraught. He used the metaphor of the “iron cage of modernity” to capture what this bureaucratic order would create. He thought many people would become unsatisfied with these cold, rational forms of legitimacy alone—that people need to believe in more than mere reason.

WHY DID THE EUROPEAN STATE DOMINATE?

We have discussed Weber at length because he has generated the best-known and still most widely used definition of the state, which is among the most fundamental concepts in comparative politics. The state was also the first modern political institution to arise chronologically, and the rise of the state had numerous implications that disrupted political systems around the world. Indeed, the state has presided over and affected all other developments and institutions of the modern period.

Importantly, it is the European version of the state and most everything else that came with it—its judicial systems, legal codes, and political institutions like democracy—that took over, was imposed on, or adopted by the rest of the world. Refer to the map in Figure 2.2 that shows the areas of the world under European control in 1914, the zenith of modern imperialism.

FIGURE 2.2 ■ The Extent of European Control, 1914.

Adapted from Philip T. Hoffman, *Why Did Europe Conquer the World?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 2.

The light blue areas of the map are regions Europeans controlled or had conquered by 1914, including colonies that had gained independence. The orange areas in this map (the Ottoman Empire or modern-day Turkey, the empires of China and Japan, Ethiopia, and Thailand) were never under European control.

Even this map understates the degree of European or Western influence. Take modern Turkey, which (as the Ottoman Empire) is shown as not being under European influence. Today there is a heated discussion about whether Turkey is “European” or not, or whether it was in 1914. But, even if late Ottoman Turkey was not “European” (however defined), in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century the “Young Turks” movement led efforts to modernize the Ottoman Empire by implementing multiparty democracy, secularism, nationalism, and a scientific worldview—all inspired by European practices. Indeed, with the possible exception of Papua New Guinea, all of the independent entities shown here were deeply if indirectly influenced by European ideas and institutions.

Japan was one of the only countries never to be formally colonized by European or western powers. Yet, it was U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry who sailed into Edo (Tokyo) Bay in 1853, precipitating the end of the closed, feudal system (called the Tokugawa shogunate). During the subsequent Meiji Restoration, the Japanese government sent teams to European countries to copy various laws—such as the French and German civil codes—which were then translated and implemented at home. Qing China was humiliated by western powers through the so-called Unequal Treaties in the nineteenth century, having to cede various territories such as Hong Kong to European colonial powers and open itself up to trade with the West. After 1949, China became a communist system—albeit one heavily influenced by a Chinese thinker, Mao Zedong—one of the quintessential European products of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Persia/Iran was also deeply influenced by European powers like Russia and the United

Kingdom, and later the United States. In fact, the first oil company in Iran was the Anglo-Persian Oil Company founded in 1908, renamed British Petroleum in 1954. Ethiopia was conquered and occupied by Italy from 1939–1941. Between 1974 and 1987 (although real change occurred only after 1991) it was ruled by a Marxist-Leninist (communist) group called the Derg.

Indeed, these examples raise one of the biggest questions—perhaps the biggest—in comparative politics and history: why Europe? Specifically, why did Europe conquer the world, and why did European concepts and institutions prevail everywhere? Why is English the lingua franca today and not Mandarin Chinese, Hindi, or Arabic? This is an important question because for the centuries leading up to the 1500s, Europe was a poor, peripheral backwater.²⁷ Advances in human civilization happened elsewhere. James C. Scott argues that the first states existed in the fertile crescent millennia before the birth of Christ.²⁸ Until well into the modern period of history (post-1500) the Islamic world—the Middle East and North Africa, also Anatolia—was much more advanced when it came to higher knowledge (mathematics, astronomy, medicine, etc.) and much richer. The same applies to the Indus River valley and many periods of history on the Indian subcontinent. Great civilizations in sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas were also evolving well, even if they were more isolated from innovations and advances elsewhere.

But, above all, China—the middle kingdom—was much more developed than Europe. China had states 1,500 to 2,000 years before Europe did.²⁹ By all accounts, the Chinese were more advanced than any other society in terms of knowledge and technology. Maps—so central to this book—were centuries ahead of European efforts.³⁰ The long list of Chinese inventions is by now veritably cliché—paper, paper money, the compass, forks, and, above all, gunpowder (given how that transformed war). Chinese maritime navigation and trade was unparalleled: Chinese explorers had sailed to the east coast of Africa, south east Asia, and Arabia. There is indeed some evidence that Chinese explorers circumnavigated the world and “discovered” North America (from the other direction) at least a century before the Europeans. (See Figure 2.3.) Yet, China did not come to conquer the world—Europe did. Why?

The Advantages of Competition

Some offer a simple answer: Europe came to have superior weapons as modernity unfolded. But then, why was this the case despite much earlier Chinese advances? Hoffman says the Europeans perfected the gunpowder technology invented by the Chinese due to a centuries-long “tournament.” For centuries, there was persistent competition among a handful of basically like-sized powers, including France, Spain, England, Austria, Prussia, and perhaps the papacy—jockeying for advantage or dominance. No one was strong enough to dominate the others and impose imperial order. Europe also faced many external threats—centuries of “barbarian” invasions such as the Huns from the east, the Vikings from the north, Arabs from the south, and later the Ottoman Turks (as late as the seventeenth century), to name a few. In this adapt-or-die scenario, building better and more lethal weapons was always advantageous. It also paid off to look as far afield as possible for technical knowledge that would help make war—to the Islamic world or China via the Silk Road, for example. Europeans would draw on knowledge from those sources to amass and improve their arsenals and extend their external empires along the way.

Here is where maps and physical geography come back in. As many have argued, most notably Jared Diamond, the European peninsula of the Eurasian landmass is actually a collection of smaller peninsulas (for instance, Scandinavia, Italy, Greece, and Iberia) or islands (like Britain and Ireland).³¹ Moreover, many of these areas are geographically contained by water or mountain ranges. The Pyrenees naturally divide France from Spain. The Alps divide Italy from German and French-speaking lands. These natural barriers made external invasion more difficult and allowed for the development of distinctive cultures and languages. Those areas without easily

FIGURE 2.3 ■ A Chinese Map of the World, ca. 1418.

CPA Media Pte Ltd/Alamy Stock Photo

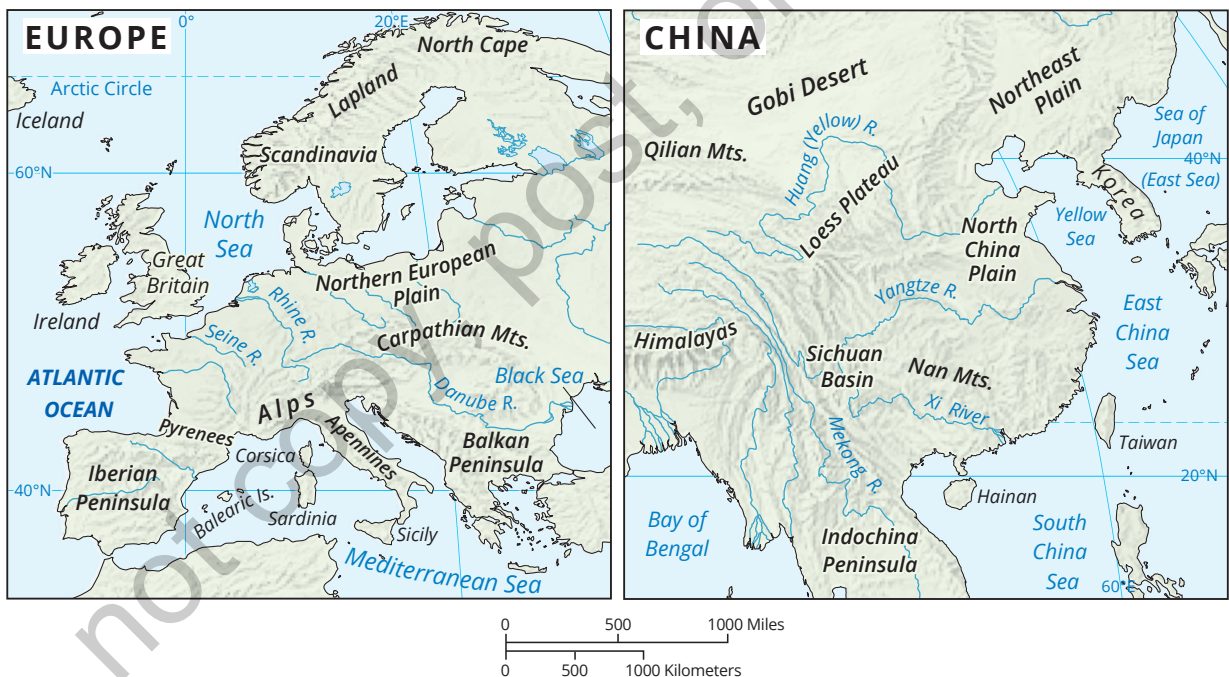
In this Chinese map of the world in 1418, the outlines of the continents are rather accurate; however, it is unclear when exactly this map was made and whether it was influenced by European maps.

definable natural borders—for example, Poland and Germany or the Low Countries (Belgium and the Netherlands) and Germany/France—had greater challenges with their development and experienced more invasions and strife over the centuries. This is to say that geographically delineated spaces were the ideal protected environment for small- or medium-sized political entities to form—replete with relatively distinctive languages and cultures. Importantly, once these cultures developed, it became very difficult to justify or accept “foreign” control.

As a result, Europe was always characterized by chronic disunity. No one has ever been able to unify the continent under one flag—not the Romans, not the Catholic Church (which even before the Protestant Reformation had eastern Orthodoxy as a rival), not Napoleon, not Hitler. Diamond argued that, like some sectors of the economy, an “optimum fragmentation principle” pertained, in which an ideal number of actors exist. There was not a solitary power holder with a monopoly who could stifle innovation and raise costs, nor too numerous actors so that no one could achieve the size necessary to innovate and produce efficiently. In short, Europe was an ideal environment for innovation because it was perfectly competitive. Constant struggle and warfare among medium-sized powers led the continent to perfect various weapons and tools at exactly the point when these could then be used to conquer other regions of the world that had just been “discovered” by the Europeans.

China, on the other hand, is a large, self-contained land mass with few indentions in its coastline (see Figure 2.4). This large space is delineated by oceans to the east, high mountains to the south and far west (Himalayas, Tian Shan, and Altay ranges), inhospitable deserts (like the Gobi and Taklamakan) or frigid expanses to the north. With the exception of several invasions from nomadic groups like the Mongols in the thirteenth century, these mighty barriers prevented invasions from other surrounding power centers in places like India, Vietnam, Russia, or Japan. Resources sufficient to create a flourishing empire were amply available within this self-contained space. Indeed, many have commented over the centuries that Chinese elites were rather disdainful of anything that came from outside this realm—with perhaps the exception of Buddhism in the first century CE. Once imperial control over the area was achieved (with the partial exception of some territories on the periphery such as Tibet, Manchuria, or present-day Xinjiang) and unified with one common script (but countless dialects), further expansion essentially ceased. Given the sophistication and preeminence of Chinese culture and technology, it is not surprising that its influence spread across the East and Southeast Asian region over the centuries. Examples include the adoption of Chinese characters in Japan, Korea, or Vietnam, as well as the “overseas” Chinese minorities in places like Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore—communities still influential today.

FIGURE 2.4 ■ The Landmasses of Europe and China



Comparison of the coastlines of China and Europe, drawn to the same scale. Note the many peninsulas and islands in Europe, compared to the more unified Chinese homeland.

The Advantages of Environment and Ecology

These geographical explanations for why Europe and not China came to dominate the world only get us so far. Was technology insufficient to project power beyond the Chinese homeland? Did the lack of competition impede China’s technological advancement beyond a certain point? Are there fundamental cultural differences between Europe and China that explain the European penchant to expand and Chinese reticence? Authors including David Landes have noted that

Chinese agriculture used night-soil (human excrement) to fertilize whereas Europeans used animal manure. Exposure to diseases and microbes from animals inoculated Europeans to many sicknesses. This situation led to a worse endemic disease environment in China compared to Europe that kept the Chinese population in poorer health.³²

Historian Karl Wittfogel approached the question with a different theory. He focused on the fact that China lacked natural water where it was most needed for agriculture.³³ Mesopotamians could easily divert the great rivers, and Europeans had ample precipitation year-round. By contrast, China required massive irrigation projects to support its agriculture, the most impressive of which was the Grand Canal, begun in the fifth century CE. Such a massive undertaking—over 1,100 miles over uneven terrain—necessitated a high degree of state power to force people to build it. In fact, it is estimated that 3 million peasants were forced to build the canal in the seventh century with about half of them dying in the process.³⁴ Some authors have argued that the Sui dynasty fell over the brutality and expense of this project. Nevertheless, centralized autocratic traditions were born and, once established, sustained. Mention might also be made of a similarly ambitious project—the Great Wall—to keep barbarian invaders out and an often-dissatisfied native population in.

The Advantages of Luck

Several authors have highlighted contingencies, chance, or bad luck to explain Europe's dominance. Some point to the "bad emperor problem" in China, positing that arbitrarily, through the genetic lottery of hereditary succession, a despotic, paranoid, or unintelligent ruler would come to power who would capriciously make (bad) policy decisions. Fukuyama has an entire explanation for why China was prone to bad rulers and Europe not so much—which has to do with the presence or absence of constraints on power due to different legal environments.³⁵ Others too have emphasized the importance of the Catholic Church for putting Europe on a different trajectory, with Christian ethics and canon law mitigating murderous impulses and perhaps doing away with clan and tribal loyalties (outside perhaps of the Balkans and Scotland) relatively early on. Finally, some authors argue that the Roman alphabet is more efficient, versatile, and accessible than the Chinese logographic system. Even today, it takes Chinese and Japanese students longer to master their languages. Finally, Europeans also seemed rather open to other cultures and knowledge—perhaps as a way to gain an advantage over regional rivals. Europeans certainly benefitted from and then perfected inventions and knowledge they borrowed, bought, or stole from elsewhere. The box, "A Closer Look: China's Aborted Naval Power," examines the historical mystery behind Zheng He's voyages in the 1400s.

A CLOSER LOOK: CHINA'S ABORTED NAVAL POWER

One of the more interesting historical puzzles concerning the development of China and Europe has to do with the voyages of Zheng He and the treasure fleet of the dragon throne. These voyages between 1405 and 1424 (one more in 1433) took place during the early Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 CE) mainly under the Yongle Emperor (ruled 1402–1424 CE)—with the greatest navy the world had ever seen. A testament to Chinese technological advancement and prowess, the ships were massive—about six times the size of Christopher Columbus's largest vessel, the *Santa Maria*. Moreover, the routes taken were all over southeast Asia, including Java, Sumatra, and Borneo, the India Ocean, the Persian Gulf, Red Sea and the eastern coast of Africa (see Figure 2.5). These routes had been used for centuries, but at a much smaller scale.

By contrast, European explorers during the “Age of Discovery” really only got started with Portuguese trips to the western African coast in the 1430s and 1450s (although Marco Polo traveling by land and sea in the late thirteenth century during the Yuan dynasty should not be forgotten). Vasco da Gama circumnavigated Africa and made it to India only in 1498 and, of course, Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492. So, China had a head start of almost a century and superior technology, yet Zheng He’s voyages were abruptly ended and not repeated.

FIGURE 2.5 ■ The Voyages of Zheng He



Adapted from Elisabeth Ellis and Anthony Esler, *World History: Connections to Today*. Prentice Hall.

What happened? As with anything so complex and deep in the past, there are competing theories—all of which, however, converge on a couple of points. First, the purposes of the voyages were to project the power and majesty of the Middle Kingdom and to subjugate and extract tribute from the “lesser” realms visited. If the tribute was not forthcoming or unimpressive, a decision could have been made just to discontinue the trips. European voyages, by contrast, were originally motivated by a variety of things like curiosity, knowledge, trading, and treasure. Moreover, there was always a fear that if the Portuguese, for instance, did not explore, the Spanish or the French might and thus seize the advantage.

Second, and most importantly, was the nature of Chinese politics. Given the autocratic power of the emperor, he or his successor had the ability to support or discontinue such voyages. The latter is exactly what happened when the Yongle Emperor died. More specifically, a powerful faction within the imperial administration that was opposed to such voyages gained the upper hand against the faction (eunuchs like Zheng He) that supported them. The ships fell into disrepair and many of the documents associated with the voyages were willfully destroyed. At times, the Chinese system turned inwards—if that was the will of the leader. There were no checks and balances, no competing power centers to the imperial court with its unsurpassed and arbitrary power. In Europe, there was always another ruler to turn to. Over many years, Columbus, for example, sought financing from Portugal, Spain, Genoa, Venice, and England before the Spanish crown supported his plans to find a western passage to Asia in 1492.

Review Questions

1. Why would a ruler or their supporters feel threatened by voyages of discovery?
2. What do you think is the best explanation for European naval dominance?

The Consequences of Europe’s Rise

As we’ve seen, there are a variety of explanations behind Europe’s rise and China’s inability to capitalize upon its early advantages. All have some evidence that is convincing. Given how far back in time these developments go and the complexity of the processes, it will likely be impossible to ever say for sure why Europe and not another region gained the advantage. Moreover, the history of Europe’s rise is often unsettling. Millions of people died when the Spaniards conquered most of Central and South America. Many European fortunes were made and incalculable human misery resulted from the Atlantic slave trade—including about 2 million deaths from the 12 million who were transported in servitude to the “New World.”³⁶ European colonization wreaked havoc on societies subjugated to foreign rule around the world—many of which are still suffering consequences today (recall our discussion of borders). And Europeans had no qualms about stealing many of the ideas, technologies, and artworks from elsewhere.

Therefore, there is much to lament and condemn about the rise of Europe. It is vitally important to expand the historical record so that the brutal consequences of European imperialism and colonization are properly known and move away from an overly Eurocentric view of history and the present. Nevertheless, in the end it was Europe, European concepts, and European institutions—foremost their conception of the state—that conquered the world. If we want to understand the world today, we have to look at the story of the rise and consequences of the European state—a task to which we turn in the next chapter.

FOR REVIEW

Chapter Summary

The state is the most fundamental political institution because it provides order and stability. As defined by Weber, it is a human community that claims the monopoly on the legitimate use of force over a given territory. Recognized boundaries and a preponderance of power compared to any other actor are key attributes. More recent authors have added other definitional characteristics such as centralized power and policy/administration.

To be fully, stable, however, states need a degree of legitimacy. Weber outlined three forms of legitimacy—traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal—with only the last form viable over the long run after countries begin to develop. Finally, it was the European states that took over the world, even though other civilizations, especially China, had earlier advantages.

KEY TERMS

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| bureaucratic (rational-legal) legitimacy | regimes |
| charismatic legitimacy | routinization |
| governments | state |
| output legitimacy | stateness issues |
| process or procedural legitimacy | traditional legitimacy |
| rationalization | |

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What did Weber mean by saying that states have “the monopoly on the use of force,” and what does it mean in practice?
2. Why have states taken on more characteristics and duties over the decades?
3. Why are charismatic and traditional forms of legitimacy no longer viable in the modern age?
4. What do you think is the most plausible reason why European states and not China came to dominate the world?

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